

ANTHOLOGY OF OPERA ARIAS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSERS
FOR LOW VOICE SINGERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

By

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Abstract

Some helpful tools for opera singers today are aria anthologies. These anthologies provide music, synopsis, and translations of arias by various composers whose music represents the standard repertoire for each voice type. These arias are used as a guide for both study and auditioning. Examples of such anthologies include G. Schirmer's group of *Aria Anthologies*,¹ and G. Schirmer's group of *American Aria Anthologies*.² An area of operatic repertoire that has not been included in such anthologies is that of works composed by African American composers. My research highlights repertoire by some of the most prominent African American composers, and groups selected arias from their works into an anthology specifically for low voice, African American singers. The composers included in this anthology are Terence Blanchard, Anthony Davis, Duke Ellington, Scott Joplin, Nkeiru Okoye, and William Grant Still.

¹ Ed. Robert L. Larsen (New York: 1991)

² Ed. Richard Walters (New York: 2004)

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Introduction

An area of operatic repertoire that has not been the basis of an anthology is that of repertoire written by African American composers. Examples of other such anthologies include *Arias for Baritone: G. Schirmer Opera Anthology*³ and the *G. Schirmer American Aria Anthology: Baritone/Bass*⁴. While touring in South America with Harlem Opera Theater I was introduced to several works by African American composers of opera including pieces by Duke Ellington and William Grant Still. Although I thought that I was very familiar with these composers, it was enlightening for me to discover their operatic works. This opportunity inspired me to become more familiar with operatic compositions of these and other African American composers. I discovered that there is an abundance of repertoire in this vein, by composers such as Scott Joplin, Anthony Davis, Terence Blanchard, Ulysses Kay, and Adolphus Hailstork. Through further research I learned that while the works of these composers had a large amount of initial success, they have failed to be included in the repertory of opera that continues to be performed. Instead, the works of composers of other races remain the most prominent vehicles for African American singers, for example: *Porgy and Bess* by Gershwin, and *Lost in the Stars* by Kurt Weill. It has also become the norm to use African American singers to perform the principal characters in Verdi's *Aida*. While I by no means desire to discredit the greatness of works by such composers as Verdi and Gershwin, I do believe that more attention and awareness should be given to the works of prominent African

³ Ed. Robert L. Larsen (New York: 1991)

⁴ Ed. Richard Walters (New York: 2004)

American composers. These works are of special interest to me as an African American singer because many of them are specifically for singers of African descent.

In this dissertation are my findings as I have researched the operatic repertoire by some of these prominent African American composers, and grouped selected arias from their works into an anthology specifically for low voice singers of African descent. The composers included in this anthology are Dr. Nkeiru Okoye, Terence Blanchard, Anthony Davis, Duke Ellington, William Grant Still, and Scott Joplin. The six selected arias were performed as part of a lecture recital. For each of these composers I have included a biography of the composer, synopsis of the opera, background information on the work, archival images of piano vocal scores for the arias I have programmed, and a description of each aria. The biographical information on these composers is a compilation of information that I have assembled from various sources. Because no comprehensive source of biographical material exists on several of these composers, the methodology used included referencing information from various articles, books, recording booklets, e-mail correspondence, phone interviews, and video interviews to produce a concise biography of each composer.⁵ These biographies are intended to be considered in relationship with the composers' musical works included in this paper.

⁵ Personal communications include the following: Bill Doggett (Anthony Davis' publicist), telephone conversation with author, July 2, 2013; Aubrey Allicock (Bass-Baritone in *Champion*), telephone conversation with author, April 23, 2013; Denyce Graves, Arthur Woodley, Aubrey Allicock, Victor Ryan Robertson, George Manahan: cast interview by author at rehearsal of *Champion*, May 25, 2013; Dr. Nkeiru Okoye, telephone conversation with author, June 8, 2013; Anthony Davis and Bill Doggett, conference call with author, July 5, 2013; Dr. Nkeiru Okoye, e-mail to author with PDF of piano vocal score to the aria "Brown Skinned Gal" from her opera *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom*, DATE?

Of the six operas included in this dissertation, the only one with a score readily available for examination is Joplin's *Treemonisha*. All that is available from Still's *Highway 1, U.S.A.* is the aria printed in an anthology of his opera arias and duets. The methodology I have employed to gather all other score images has been direct contact with individuals who have access to scores. For Terence Blanchard's *Champion*, I have been in contact with Opera Theatre of St. Louis Artistic Director Paul Kilmer, and Director of Education, Allison Felter. They have given me a piano vocal score to examine and permission to perform an aria from the opera on my lecture recital, which took place before the premiere of the opera. A piano vocal score for Anthony Davis' *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* is only available at the New York Public Library, and can only be viewed in the library. Scores are also available for rent through G. Schirmer's score rental department. I obtained my images of the score at the New York Public Library and have also been in direct contact with Mr. Davis for permission to include his work as part of this dissertation. A complete score to Ellington's *Queenie Pie* is not available to the public. I obtained a piano vocal score arranged by Marc T. Boltin from the General Director of Harlem Opera Theatre, Gregory Hopkins, to perform it on a South American tour in the summer of 2012. I was introduced to Dr. Okoye through another young African American composer, Dr. Chad Hughes. Dr. Okoye has been very helpful in allowing me to speak with her about her work, and by e-mailing a piano vocal score of the aria from her opera *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom*.

Because all of these pieces are written for orchestra, certain performance practice issues were present at the recital; issues such as difficulty interpreting the piano reduction

of the orchestral score, balance between the voice and piano, and the inability to account for all the orchestral instrumentation using just piano. With this in mind I arranged saxophone accompaniment for two of the pieces that incorporate a jazz style. My score arrangements were for “Brown Skinned Gal” from Dr. Okoye’s *Harriet Tubman*, and “Woman” from Ellington’s *Queenie Pie*. My arrangements were created by extracting melodic material present in the piano vocal score. The decision to choose saxophone was partially based upon the use of a similar arrangement with Harlem Opera Theater in the South American tour concerts, instrumentation heard in the recording of *Queenie Pie*, the availability of an excellent saxophonist, University of Kansas doctoral candidate Brandon McCray, and the improvisational nature of both pieces. Dr. Okoye also indicates in her score that improvisation during a specific section of the piece is encouraged. While I chose saxophone to be used in my recital, similar arrangements could be made for other instruments as well.

My reasons for using these six particular composers were based on familiarity and interaction with them and their works. I have previously had opportunities to perform pieces by Ellington, Joplin, and Still. I have also had opportunities to speak directly with Terence Blanchard via Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Anthony Davis via correspondence, with his publicist William Doggett, and Okoye via e-mail and phone correspondence. Some worthy operas by other African American composers which I have not included are *Joshua’s Boots* by Adolphus Hailstorck, *Frederick Douglass* by Ulysses Kay, *Amistad* by Anthony Davis, and *Troubled Island* by William Grant Still.

1-Dr. Nkeiru Okoye

Dr. Nkeiru Okoye's compositions have been performed by several prestigious American orchestras, establishing her as one of the most prominent African American woman composers today.⁶ She began composing at the age of 13, when she won her first national music composing competition.⁷ Dr. Okoye is of African American and Nigerian descent, and was born and raised on Long Island, NY. She holds a bachelor's in composition from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and a master's and Ph.D. in music theory and composition from Rutgers University. Currently she serves on the music composition faculty at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Among Dr. Okoye's most famous compositions are the song cycle *I Hear America Singing: Brooklyn Cinderella* and the opera *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom*. Both of these operas were commissioned by the American Opera Project.⁸ *Harriet Tubman* was originally meant to be an oratorio, but the work grew into a full-length opera. Okoye has also taken arias from the opera and grouped them into the song cycle *Songs of Harriet Tubman* that is performed as a stand-alone piece. The arias included in the song cycle are *My Name is Araminta; My Name is Harriet, Now; I Am Harriet Tubman, Free Woman; I Am Moses, The Liberator*. Each of the songs focus on different names that are connected to the various stages of Tubman's life as she transformed from a slave to a freedom fighter. The idea of composing the opera on the subject of Harriet Tubman came to Ms.

⁶ http://nkbuye1.wix.com/tubman#!_nkeiru-okoye-home-page/bio

⁷ McNatt, "Is This How it Is."

⁸ http://nkbuye1.wix.com/tubman#!_nkeiru-okoye-home-page/bio

Okoye when she decided to begin writing vocal music in 2004.⁹ Until that time she had focused primarily on composing instrumental pieces, including a short work for orchestra called *Voices Shouting Out*, which is her most famous composition. Wanting to compose about strong female figures in African American history, she considered both Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. The decision came while she was living in Baltimore and began to research information about Harriet Tubman. Tubman was a slave born in Maryland, who came to lead other slaves to freedom through a secret network of safe houses and routes called the Underground Railroad. In an e-mail to me, Dr. Okoye had the following to say about her decision to use Harriet Tubman as the subject of her opera:

I chose Harriet over Sojourner because Tubman came from Maryland, and I was living in Maryland when I started the project. While both women appealed to me, I thought that community support would be greater for Tubman where I lived.¹⁰

During a phone conversation with Dr. Okoye, she also indicated that she had decided to compose on Tubman to provide a work from the perspective of a person of African descent. Many of the previous works she discovered used racist vocabulary or depicted Tubman as a buffoon. Instead, Dr. Okoye wanted to create something with a more accurate depiction, and that demonstrated African Americans being empowered and in control of their own destiny.¹¹

⁹ Lipson, "Songs, Some Coded."

¹⁰ Dr. Nkeiru Okoye, e-mail to author with PDF of piano vocal score to the aria "Brown Skinned Gal" from her opera *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom*, April 26, 2013

¹¹ Dr. Nkeiru Okoye, telephone conversation with composer, June 8, 2013

The opera is in two acts with five solo leads and 5 - 10 supporting roles that also are members of the chorus. Specific cast, orchestration, and synopsis information is as follows:

CAST:

HARRIET TUBMAN, Araminta Ross, protagonist/Soprano
RITTIA ROSS, her mother/Contralto
BEN ROSS, her father/Tenor
RACHEL ROSS, her younger sister/Soubrette
JOHN TUBMAN, her suitor/Baritone

SUPPORTING ROLES:

WILLIAM STILL, Underground Railroad Stationmaster/Character tenor
OVERSEER PITTS / Bass
SAM GREEN, Southern preacher and abolitionist/Bass-baritone
YOUNG ARAMINTA (optional)/Girl Soprano
EDWARD BRODESS, SLAVECATCHER BAKER, Plantation owner/Tenor
QUAKER WIDOW, Abolitionist/Mezzo-soprano
MONROE, runaway/Baritone
ROBERT ROSS/Baritone
JUNIOR ROSS/Baritone
HENRY ROSS/Bass
MILLIE, LETICIA STILL/Soprano
CAROLINE/Contralto
KEZZIA/Soprano
TILLIE, a runaway
JONAH, a runaway
JOE BAILEY, a runaway

CHORUS:

Plantation Folk, Harriet's Brothers, Slaves, Free Negroes, Slave Owners, Farmers, Townspeople, Children, and Abolitionists

NONSPEAKING ROLES:

ITINERANT COUNTRY FIDDLER
MODESTY, Young Ghanaian woman
AGED AUNT HARRIET, Tubman at 90 years old
ELI, Rachel's suitor

MONROE, a runaway¹²

STRING ORCHESTRATION INSTRUMENTATION:

Vocal Ensemble, Strings, and Piano

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA ORCHESTRATION:

Vocal Ensemble, Flute/Piccolo, Oboe/English Horn, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Trumpet, Trombone, Piano, Percussion, Strings¹³

SYNOPSIS:

ACT I: IN SLAVERY

The opera begins around 1829 in Dorchester County, MD with young Araminta “Minty” Ross. She has been born into slavery and is sent away from her family to work for other plantation owners in the area. Over the years Minty suffers numerous mishaps, one of which leaves her in a coma. Minty is sent back to the plantation where her family members are to recover. After her recovery, some of her new duties include learning lumbering from her father and brothers. Minty is mindful of the climate in which she finds herself, where human beings can be bought and sold. She vows that "nothing but the grave" will separate her from her younger sister, Rachel. Time passes and we see a young adult Minty who decides to change her name to Harriet. Harriet is introduced to a free man named John Tubman whom she later marries. When she hears that she is to be sold, Harriet runs away to the north.

ACT II: IN FREEDOM

Harriet makes her way to Philadelphia. There she meets Reverend Sam Green and a Quaker Woman who help her continue north to find freedom. She then makes her

¹² http://nkbuye1.wix.com/tubman#!_harriet-tubman/specs

¹³ http://nkbuye1.wix.com/tubman#!_harriet-tubman/specs/vstc5=orchestra

way to the famous Stationmaster of Philadelphia's Underground Railroad Network, William Still and his wife. We next see Tubman two years later as a seasoned part of the abolitionist network. She tells of her escape and ambitions of returning to Maryland and liberating her family, using what she's learned as an abolitionist. Supported by other members of the abolitionist network, and with funds that she has earned, she begins traveling home on missions to rescue small groups of her family and friends. Even though her missions are successful, Tubman continuously struggles to convince her younger sister Rachel to join her. Nonetheless, her fame grows as she continues to rescue an increasing number of runaways from slavery. Her endeavors become so heralded that she earns the title "Moses, the Liberator."

ARIA

I Want A Brown Skinned Gal

From: Act I

Setting: Dorchester County, MD

Character: John Tubman, a free black man

Range: G2 - G 4

Tessitura: E ♭ 3 - C4

John Tubman is a free black man who has just been introduced to Harriet Ross and immediately begins to flirt and pursue her. Although Harriet is shy about being dark skinned, John explains that features of a dark skinned woman are what he really believes are beautiful. The musical form for the piece uses a standard ABA song form, preceded by brief accompanied recitative. The musical style incorporates elements of jazz, blues, and swing, including areas where the composer encourages the performer to improvise.

Lyrics:

Some men, they like a yellow gal with skin near white and hair so long.
Leave thoughts of Africa and slaves behind.
"No gal as dark as me" he says, and to his darker sisters, he's unkind.

But me, I like a brown skinned gal, skin color of molasses.
Brown skinned gal, broad nose and long eyelashes.

Your nappy hair and dark brown skin have torn up my heart.
Marry me, my Baby.
Be my brown skinned, brown skinned gal.

I want a brown skinned gal.
No other one will do.
Be my brown skinned gal, can't think of none but you.
Some folks like them lighter, thinks their future's brighter.
But me, I want a brown skinned woman for my bride.

Just the thought of her heats me up inside.
Girl, I love them rounded hips.
Want to kiss them juicy lips.
So I just want a brown skinned, round hipped, juicy lipped, broad nosed, nappy headed,
brown skinned woman.¹⁴

¹⁴ Okoye, "Brown Skinned Gal."

2-Terence Blanchard

Terence Blanchard was born in New Orleans in 1962 and began to study music at the age of five. After beginning with piano lessons, he switched to trumpet after hearing a well-known street musician, trumpeter Alvin Alcorn.¹⁵ Blanchard's father, Joseph Blanchard, a respected businessman in the community, approached Mr. Alcorn to teach his son. When Mr. Alcorn refused to do so, it left a very strong impression on young Terence. Alcorn explained that he had learned to play on his own, without formal training, and thought this was the best way to develop the kind of musicianship that makes one's playing unique. With that in mind, young Terence set out on his musical career as a jazz trumpeter. It was not until being encouraged to study at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) by young trumpeter Wynton Marsalis that he decided to study formally. While enrolled at the NOCCA he met saxophonist Donald Harrison and pianist Ellis Marsalis, who both initially encouraged him to play piano. They introduced him to various recordings of jazz musicians such as Miles Davis and Clifford Brown. Although Blanchard was now studying formally, his technique was still fundamentally based on what he had learned on his own as a street musician. After playing on the soundtrack for two movies by famed director Spike Lee (*She's Gotta Have It*, and *School Daze*), Lee contacted Blanchard and asked if he would be the trumpet acting consultant for his next film *Mo' Better Blues*. Lee wanted Blanchard to teach actor, Denzel Washington, how to be more convincing in the role of Bleek

¹⁵ Magro, *Contemporary Cat*.

Gilliam. The lead character of the movie is a self-obsessed trumpeter, and Lee wanted as much realism as possible. During this time, Blanchard was forced into a hiatus from performing because of embouchure issues that were now causing him great pain. The street musician technique that had brought him so far was now preventing him from taking his playing to the next level. Although Blanchard was not playing on the project, working closely with Lee as a consultant strengthened their relationship and trust to the point that Lee would later ask him to score his next film, *Jungle Fever*. Blanchard and Lee would continue to collaborate on films, including *Malcolm X*, for which Blanchard received critical acclaim for the film score. Blanchard would go on to receive five Grammy Awards, including his first for the *A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)*. Blanchard's most recent compositions include the score to the film *Red Tails* with executive director George Lucas, and his first opera *Champion*.

Champion was co-commissioned by Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Jazz St. Louis to premiere in the summer of 2013.¹⁶ Opera Theatre of St. Louis is a highly regarded opera company which has become known for promoting new works, and performing all their operas in English. They have long been supporters of young singers on their way to stardom, including such artists as Kelly Kaduce, Nathan Gunn, Lawrence Brownlee, Morris Robinson, Christine Brewer, Thompson Hampson, and Jerry Hadley.

¹⁶ Stern, "Five-Time Grammy" and "National and Local Funders."

Jazz St. Louis is a not-for-profit organization that promotes the advancement of jazz through various creative programs. They are especially recognized for their Jazz At The Bistro concert series, which presents some of the world's greatest jazz musicians in performance, educates audiences about jazz, and trains future musicians to continue to advance the genre.

The librettist for *Champion* is playwright, filmmaker, and actor Michael Cristofer. This was also his first opportunity to write an opera libretto. He is the 1977 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner for *Shadow Box*. Currently, he can be seen on the television series *Smash* as Jerry Rand.

For the world premiere of *Champion* the cast included Bass-Baritone Arthur Woodley as Old Emile, Mezzo-Soprano Denyce Graves as Emelda, and Baritone Robert Orth as Howie. There also were several young artists who have very promising careers ahead of them including tenor Victor Ryan Robertson as Benny Paret, and Bass-Baritone Aubrey Allicock as Young Emile. The opera tells the story of prize fighter Emile Griffith as he struggles with killing a man in the ring and the stigma of his homosexuality in 1960's American society. The opera is noteworthy for presenting the lead character, Emile, in three different stages of his life. Specific information about the opera is as follows:

CAST:

EMILE GRIFFITH, a retired champion professional boxer/Bass
YOUNG EMILE GRIFFITH, the champion in his prime/Bass-Baritone

LITTLE EMILE, Emile as a young boy/Boy Soprano
EMELDA GRIFFITH, Emile's mother/Mezzo-Soprano
HOWIE ALBERT, Emile's trainer/Baritone
KATHY HAGAN, a bar owner/Mezzo-Soprano
BENNY "KID" PARET/BENNY PARET JR., a boxer/his son/Tenor
LUIS RODRIGO GRIFFITH, Emile's adopted son and caretaker/Tenor
SADIE DONASTROG GRIFFITH/COUSIN BLANCHE, Emile's wife/cousin/Soprano
RING ANNOUNCER/Tenor

Chorus: Reporters, photographers, hat makers, men at the boxing gym, doctors, stretcher carriers, Caribbean paraders, fight fans, drag queens, bar patrons, gay bashers, people on the street in New York City.

ORCHESTRATION:

Full orchestra and jazz trio with piano, double-bass, and drums¹⁷

SYNOPSIS:

Act I

The opera begins in the present day at the home of Old Emile. He suffers from dementia and is being cared for by his adopted son, Luis. They are preparing for Emile to visit with Benny "Kid" Paret's son, Benny Jr. Old Emile begins to reminisce about the past when he first began to box. Young Emile then enters and begins to sing happily about his dreams for the future. Old Emile continues to reminisce about the past and the time when he was reunited with his mother. Emelda enters and begins to speak to Young Emile, but mistakes him for her other son, Frankie. After she realizes who he is, she sings of her decisions to leave her children in pursuit of men. Old Emile then recalls meeting Mr. Albert. Emelda attempts to persuade Mr. Albert to hire Young Emile as a hat maker, and begins to show him the hats that Young Emile has

¹⁷ Blanchard,, *Champion*, Act 2.

made. But when Mr. Albert sees Young Emile's incredible physique, he asks Emile to be a professional boxer. Although not a profession Emile is interested in, he agrees to do so after very strong encouragement from his mother. Old Emile remembers visiting Hagen's Hole, a local gay club. Young Emile meets owner Kathy Hagen, who entices him with the various options of partners available at her establishment. As Young Emile takes advantage of Hagen's hospitality, Little Emile enters and is being punished by his Cousin Blanche, who forces him to hold bricks over his head. When Blanche accuses Little Emile of having the devil in him, he prays that the devil would make him strong. As Old Emile continues to reminisce, he recalls his fight with Benny Paret. Paret enters and insults Young Emile by calling him a *maricon* (Spanish for faggot). When Young Emile attempts to confide in Howie, Howie insists that a fighter cannot entertain such thoughts, and must have a "killer instinct." As Young Emile continues to struggle with Paret's insult, he sings of his feelings about what determines manhood. In the championship bout against Paret, Young Emile wins with a flurry of seventeen unanswered punches that accidentally kills Paret.

Act II

As Old Emile continues to struggle with dementia, he hallucinates about his upcoming visit with Benny, Jr. Again, Luis helps him prepare for the visit. As the Young Emile indulges in the benefits of being a fighting champion, he is cautioned by his mother about living such a loose life. After Young Emile

scolds her for daring to give him life lessons, Emelda sings of her regrets for abandoning her children. As Young Emile continues to enjoy his success, Howie sings of his frustration about Paret being allowed to fight. Old Emile then reminisces about the decline of his boxing career after the death of Paret. After Howie tells Young Emile that his boxing career is over, Young Emile visits a local gay bar, where he is attacked by gay bashers. Luis then runs in to calm Old Emile as he begins to hallucinate about that tragic evening. It is finally time for Benny, Jr.'s visit, and at first Old Emile mistakes him for his father. Old Emile apologizes to Benny, Jr. and asks him to forgive him. Benny, Jr. insists that Old Emile would have to do that for himself.

ARIA

What Makes A Man A Man

From: Act I

Setting: New York City 1962

Character: Young Emile, a prize fighter

Range: B ♭ 3 - F 4

Tessitura: C3 - C4

After being called a *Maricon* (faggot) by Benny “Kid” Paret, Young Emile seeks counsel from his trainer Howie. Howie suggests that homosexual thoughts or activity negate a man’s manhood, which leaves Emile to come to his own conclusion about what defines manhood for him. Musically, there is no clearly identifiable tonal center; however, the aria is very lyrical and not atonal. Blanchard uses various jazz chords that shift chromatically in the accompaniment, with the solo vocal line moving more lyrically above.

Lyrics:

What makes a man a man?

What makes a man the man he is?

Is it the flesh and bone? Inside? Outside?

Is it the skin he wears?

The color of his voice?
The walk he walks?
The talk he talks? Inside? Outside?
What makes this man a man?
Is it the life he's lived?
The yesterdays?
Or what he dreams for the tomorrow days? Inside? Outside?
There is a heart I know somewhere inside.
You hear it beat, you hear it sing
It cries and talks to you
And tells you what you feel, is what you feel inside.
I makes you strong?
Or does it make you weak outside?
There is a soul,
I know somewhere inside
You feel it pull
You feel it lift
It carries you and take you where you know you have to go
And love is in this heart and in this soul.
It makes you strong inside?
Or does it make you weak? Inside? Outside?
And somewhere there, where love is living, there is a man.
Who is the man I am inside?
The man I am.
And outside? Outside?
This man that all this world can see
Who is this man?
Who is this man who calls himself me?
There was no sound
There were no people I could see
In my head, the place was empty
There was no one there but me
*Maricon*¹⁸

¹⁸ Blanchard, *Champion*, Act 1, 21

3-Anthony Davis

Anthony Davis was born in 1951 to Charles Twitchell and Jeanne Davis. His family has a long history of well-educated black men and women, including his father who has held teaching positions at Princeton University and Yale University. Initially, Davis taught himself to play jazz piano, but focused on classical works when he began studying piano formally. When he was in the tenth grade, while traveling with his father in Italy, he discovered recordings of jazz pianist, Thelonius Monk (1917-1982). He immediately fell in love with his style of playing, and began to study Monk's pieces for piano. Monk would continue to be a musical role model for Davis throughout his early music career. After completing music studies at Yale University, Davis moved to New York where he began performing with several jazz bands specializing in avant-garde and free jazz. During this period, Davis would become one of the world's foremost improvisational jazz pianists, recording three albums in 1978: *Past Lives*, *Of Blues and Dreams*, and *Crystal Texts*. Desiring an ensemble to perform more of his compositions, he formed his octet Episteme (Greek for "knowledge") in 1981. With Episteme, Davis would continue to showcase his now blossomed compositional skills. Piero Scaruffi says the following of Davis' style:

Davis continued to experiment with rhythmic movement and instability, pitting constant pulses against angular tempos, extracting pathos from the collision of instrumental parts in different tempos. Davis' compositions were layered, having at least a lower layer of rhythmic organization and a higher level of lyrical/melodic sound-painting, and relying on the continuous contrast between the two levels for the spontaneous emergence of meaning.¹⁹

¹⁹ Scaruffi, "Anthony Davis."

Eventually, Davis' compositional prowess would bring him critical acclaim when his piece, *Wayang 5*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1984. *Wayang 5* is for piano and symphonic orchestra. It was composed for the San Francisco Symphony, and was also Davis' first venture into using electronic music. Following this, Davis' compositions would continue to become more ambitious, culminating with his first opera, *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1986). Davis first got the idea of the opera from his brother, actor Christopher Davis. Initially, Christopher Davis envisioned the work in the style of a musical. After serious contemplation however, Anthony came to the conclusion that the subject matter of Malcolm X could best be displayed theatrically in the genre of an opera. In an interview for Opera America, Davis said about the opera *X* that "Malcolm X is a modern, tragic, hero" ²⁰ He also expressed that he had long been in search of the most appropriate material to use to create an opera, and that this subject matter was the one that spoke to him. Following the success of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, Davis would go on to compose several other operas that were very well received by the opera community. Now, Mr. Davis is considered by George Steel, General Director of New York City Opera, to be "the most important American composer of opera." ²¹

X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X has a libretto written by Davis' cousin, poet Thulani Davis. ²² [<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/thulani-davis>] It depicts several

²⁰ Anthony Davis, Opera America Salon Series, October 16, 2012:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JY-MniKGHTQ&feature=youtu.be>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Thulani Davis is an interdisciplinary artist who has written poetry, novels, plays, and screenplays. As described on the poet's website, Davis's work in all genres "shares a passionate concern with history, justice, [and] African American life and is marked by the journalist's eye for the uncovered truth." Her poetry collections include *Playing the Changes* (1985) and *All the Renegade Ghosts Rise* (1978).

significant events in Malcolm's life including the death of his father when he was five, his time on the streets as "Detroit Red," his conversion to the Nation of Islam, and ultimately his assassination. While the opera had several preliminary showings, its official premiere was with the New York City Opera in 1986, making it only the "second opera by a living black composer to debut in a leading American opera house."²³

Although *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* enjoyed enormous success upon its premiere, it has not been performed since 1986. Specific information about the opera is as follows:

CAST:

MALCOLM/Baritone
ELIJAH/STREET/Tenor
LOUISE/BETTY/Soprano
ELLA/Mezzo-soprano
REGINALD/Bass-baritone
YOUNG MALCOLM LITTLE/Boy Soprano

Ensemble: (minimum 15 members)
Player, Inmate, Youth, Muslim/Tenor
Social Worker, the Blonde, Girlfriend, Reporter/Soprano
Garvey Preacher, Father, Player, Inmate, Orator, Muslim/Baritone
Queen Mother/Mezzo-soprano
Policeman, Guard, Pilgrim, Reporter/Tenor
Blind Man, Salesman, Player, Inmate, Numbers Runner, Muslim, Pilgrim/Bass
Neighbor, Preacher, Player, Inmate, Youth, Muslim, Pilgrim/Baritone
Neighbor, Player, Inmate, Boyfriend, Muslim, Pilgrim/Baritone
Neighbor, Player, Inmate, Muslim, Pilgrim/Tenor
Neighbor, Musician, Inmate, Youth, Muslim, Pilgrim/Tenor
Neighbor, Laborer, Inmate, Muslim, Pilgrim/Tenor
Neighbor, Bootblack, Player, Inmate, Paper Peddler, Muslim, Pilgrim/Tenor

²³Sussman, "Anthony Davis." See also <http://www.answers.com/topic/anthony-davis-football-player#page2>

Neighbor, Church Woman, Muslim, Pilgrim/Mezzo-soprano
Neighbor, Beautician, Mother, Muslim, Pilgrim/Soprano
Neighbor, Malcolm's Sweetheart, Teen, Muslim, Pilgrim/Soprano
Neighbor, Businesswoman, Muslim, Pilgrim/Mezzo-soprano
Policeman, Guard, Pilgrim, Reporter/White Tenor
Policeman, Guard, Pilgrim, Reporter/White Tenor

Figurants:

Young Reginald Little, Muslim boy
Yvonne Little, Muslim girl
Hilda Little, Muslim girl
Clothes Salesman, Dope Fiend, Muslim
Teen, Dancer, Student, Muslim
White Policeman, Guard, Pilgrim, Photographer
Teen, Dancer, Student, Muslim
Young Woman, Dancer, Muslim

ORCHESTRATION:

3 Flutes, Piccolo, Alto Saxophone, 2 Soprano Saxophones, 3 Clarinets in B ♭, 2 Bass Clarinets, Alto Flute, Contrabass Clarinet, Tenor Saxophone, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, 2 Horn in F, 1 Jazz Trumpet, 2 Trombones, 2 Bass Trombones, 3 Jazz Percussionists, Jazz Piano, 10 Violins, 3 Viola, 3 Celli, 2 Bass, 1 Jazz Cello, 1 Jazz Bass²⁴

SYNOPSIS:

Act I

The opera begins in the year 1931. The Universal Negro Improvement Association is holding their meeting at the home of Rev. Earl Little, Malcolm's father. Rev. Little is the leader of the association. The meeting is ready to begin but Rev. Little has not arrived, when a white policeman enters, claiming Rev. Little was killed in an accident. Mrs. Little doesn't believe the policeman, but rather that he has been killed by a Klan-like group. She becomes distraught and suffers a breakdown. Because she isn't

²⁴ Davis, *X--The Life and Times*, 2.

capable of properly taking care of Malcolm and his siblings, the Social Worker takes them away from her and disperses the children into the custody of the state. Several years later, Malcolm's sister, Ella, is making a good living for herself in Boston and convinces him to come to live with her. While in Boston, Malcolm meets Street, a charismatic hustler who "schools" Malcolm in the ways of being a street hustler. He introduces Malcolm to drug abuse, womanizing, and robbery. Mesmerized by black city life in Boston, Malcolm begins to live carelessly, and ultimately is arrested. While in prison, Malcolm begins to examine his life and the forces that have shaped it.

Act II

During the years 1946-48 Malcolm is visited in prison by his brother Reginald. Reginald has converted to the Nation of Islam, and encourages Malcolm to become a believer as well. Sensing a need for change in his life, Malcolm converts and begins to study the Koran as well as black history. Upon his release from prison, Malcolm has the opportunity to meet Elijah Muhammad. Elijah takes Malcolm under his wing as a sort of protégé, and begins to teach him Allah's Law. Believing that Malcolm could be a great asset to the Nation of Islam, Elijah sends him out to spread Allah's word, and Malcolm renounces his "slave name," Little, and exchanges it for an "X." Malcolm uses Harlem as his ministry base. Then in 1963, during an interview in reference to the assassination of President Kennedy, Malcolm gives a controversial response, stating "the chickens have come home to roost." Following these comments, he is summoned to see Elijah, who silences him for three months.

Act III

During Malcolm's period of silence, his wife Betty convinces him to make the 'hajj' to Mecca. In Mecca, Malcolm has the opportunity to fellowship with Muslims from various races. This experience convinces him to renounce his separatist ideas, and to join the larger community of Islam. After returning from Mecca, reporters accuse Malcolm of sparking violence that has been erupting in Harlem while he was abroad. Rather than rejoining members of the Nation of Islam in Harlem, Malcolm changes his name to El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and intends to address the United Nations with grievances of black Americans. Despite death threats, El-Shabazz proceeds with a speech in Harlem, where he is assassinated by gunmen.

ARIA

I Wouldn't Tell You What I Know

From: Act I

Setting: In Prison

Character: Malcolm Little

Range: B3 - F#4 (Optional A#5)

Tessitura: C#3 - C#4

Malcolm has been convicted of robbery, and is now serving time in the state penitentiary. While serving his time, he begins to examine his life and the forces that have shaped it. The music is through-composed with periodic shifts of meter between 5/8, 6/8, and 4/4. Davis also layers these varying meters on top of each other simultaneously, creating a denser texture using minimal material.

Lyrics:

I wouldn't tell you what I know,
You wouldn't hear my truth.
You want the story but ya don't want to know.
My truth is you've been on me a very long time.
Longer than I can say.
As long as I've been living,

You've had your foot on me,
Always pressing.
My truth is White men killed my old man,
Drove my mother mad.
My truth is rough,
My truth could kill,
My truth is fury.
They always told me,
You don't have a chance
You're a nigger after all.
You can jitterbug and prance
But you'll never run the ball.
My truth told me,
Quit before you start.
My truth told me
Staying alive is all you got.
I've shined your shoes,
I've sold your dope,
Hauled your bootleg,
Played with hustler's hope,
But the crime is mine.
I will do your time
So you can sleep.
I won't be out to get you on the street at night,
But I won't forget any evil that's white.
My truth is a hammer coming from the back.
It will beat you down when you least expect.
I wouldn't tell you what I know,
You want the truth,
You want the truth.
You want the truth but you don't want to know.²⁵

²⁵ Davis, *X--The Life and Times*, 116-124.

4-Edward Kennedy ‘Duke’ Ellington

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington, DC in 1899 to James Edward Ellington and Daisy Kennedy Ellington, who were both amateur musicians. Although his father was an avid opera lover, he played piano by ear. His mother read music and preferred to play popular music and ragtime. Edward began taking lessons at the age of eight, and although he enjoyed music and playing the piano, traditional lessons did not keep his interest. Instead he relied primarily on his natural talent, and sharpened his skills by learning popular music on his own, charming both trained and untrained professionals into giving him lessons. He was able to support himself as a professional musician before graduating from high school. His first composition, *Soda Fountain Rag*, was written in 1914, before Ellington had learned to compose using musical notation. He preferred not to do so because he believed it helped him to create a more ‘gutbucket’ sound, and also because much of his music was created through live collaboration with members of his orchestra.²⁶ With his orchestra, Ellington became one of the musical leaders of the Harlem Renaissance during the late 1920s and early 1930s playing in such venues as the Cotton Club.²⁷ However, he did eventually study composition, again informally, with Will Marion Cook (1869-1944). Cook was a well-educated musician, composer, and leader of the Harlem musical community. Cook also

²⁶ Pierpont, "Black, Brown, and Beige"

²⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Harlem Renaissance", accessed August 08, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255397/Harlem-Renaissance/272825/Black-heritage-and-American-culture>.

composed the first ragtime opera, *Origin of the Cakewalk*.²⁸ Through Cook, Ellington was inspired to be innovative in his compositions, moving outside of the established normal musical idioms for black composers of the time, such as those found in songs produced for vaudeville shows and in Tin Pan Alley. This can be observed in Ellington's compositions becoming longer and more elaborate, such as in *Creole Rhapsody* (1931), *Reminiscing in Tempo* (1935), *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* (1937), and *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943), with which Ellington made his Carnegie Hall debut. Following this, Ellington began to express his intent to compose an even larger work based on his view of Black American experiences. With *Black, Brown, and Beige* he began to experiment with formal structures that would provide the basis for his folk opera *Queenie Pie*. It wouldn't be until 1967 that he produced an outline of the plot for the folk opera. While the finished libretto sparked interest by WNET to produce a televised version of the opera, since Ellington had only left behind a piano vocal score, it would not be produced until after his death, when it was fully orchestrated by Betty McGettigan.²⁹

Queenie Pie is based upon details that Ellington had developed over the course of his career including the feminine subject upon which the story line is based. The heroine is meant to reflect the miraculous life of the Harlem beautician and entrepreneur Madame C. J. Walker. Themes pulled from her life

²⁸ Ottervik, *The Use of Jazz in Opera*, 44.

²⁹ Ellington et al., *Queenie Pie*, 4.

such as feminine beauty, wealth, and black cultural advancement became the cornerstones for the opera. Specific information on the opera is as follows:

CAST:

QUEENIE PIE, an award winning Harlem beautician/Contralto
CAFÉ OLAY, Queenie's rival Harlem beautician/Soprano
HOLT FAYE, chairperson for the Annual Beautician Competition/Baritone
LIL' DADDY, Queenie's assistant and confidante/Baritone
THE KING, Ruler of the Island/Bass
THE NARRATOR/Mezzo-Soprano
REPORTER/Soprano
CHORUS

ORCHESTRATION:

5 Saxophones, 4 Trumpets, 4 Trombones, 1 Piano, 1 Bass, 1 Drum Set³⁰

SYNOPSIS:

Act I: May 13th, 1930's Harlem

As the opera begins, the annual Beautician-Cosmetologist competition is taking place. The Title of *Queenie Pie* has once again been bestowed upon the beautician voted the best in Harlem, and Queenie has been the winner for the past 10 years. In conjunction with the competition, the people of Harlem are having a Mardi Gras celebration. After the competition, Queenie and her friends relax at "Queenie's Place," her beauty shop. There, she tells everyone about herself and her ascension to Queen. Life in Harlem returns to normal until the arrival of Café Olay. Olay is a young and beautiful upcoming beautician in Harlem, with whom the officiator of the annual competition, Holt Fay, has fallen in love. Life in the Harlem community takes a tragic turn when

³⁰ Ellington et al., *Queenie Pie*, 8

Olay kills Fay. Although the circumstances of her major competitor, Olay, cause Queenie to win the next year's competition by default, she realizes that the times are changing.

Act II: One year later

As her community evolves, Queenie is struggling to find new and innovative ways to make her business continue to thrive. When her assistant, Lil' Daddy, tells Queenie of the magical Papaluna plant from his home island, she decides to go in search of it. Lil' Daddy explains that the Papaluna plant is believed to produce an everlasting beauty formula, but warns her that the trip could be very treacherous. While on the journey, Queenie realizes how much she loves her Harlem home, but is also inspired by the opportunity to see Lil' Daddy's magical island home. When she successfully obtains the Papaluna, she returns home with a reinvigorated passion and professional drive. She is determined to advance not only her own career, but the lives of her friends and loved ones in her community. The opera ends with her return to New York with even more appreciation for all aspects of her home.

ARIA

Woman

From: Act I

Setting: Harlem, New York 1930's

Character: Holt Fay, the Chairperson for the Annual Beautician-Cosmetologist Competition

Range: B ♭ 3 - C#4

Tessitura: B ♭ 3 - B ♭ 4

As Café Olay, a young and beautiful upcoming beautician in Harlem, enters, Fay is completely enthralled with her. When he is no longer able to hide his extreme attraction to her, he begins to sing of his suspicion that she must have a special potion that renders him incapable of resisting her. The music for this aria is completely in the form of a standard jazz shuffle. The form begins with a brief musical introduction and proceeds with ABA form.

Lyrics:

Woman!

Beautiful Woman coming on like crazy.

Will she stay or go?

Woman's a strange kind of human,

Being so darn certain that I'll never go.

Her secret brew, it fills my cup.

What can I do?

Where can I go to give up?

Woman!

Voluptuous Woman stacking up my day dreams

With her rosy glow.³¹

³¹ Ellington et al., *Queenie Pie*, 11

5-William Grant Still

William Grant Still, Jr. was born in 1895 to William Grant Still, Sr. and Carrie Fambro, who had both received very good educations, especially considering the racial climate in which they lived.³² Still's father died months after he was born, which caused his mother to move the family to Little Rock, Arkansas. There, his mother would continue to impress upon him the need to pursue a more advanced education than was typically encouraged for the black community, in the hopes that he would do something for the advancement of the race. In that time period being a musician was a career field (although not a very lucrative one) advocated for black people. Despite his mother's opposition, Still decided to pursue the profession, but would try to use music to accomplish some of her hopes of advancing the lives of black people in America. After graduating high school, Still attended Wilberforce University, a school with no music program. Being bitten by the "opera bug" after listening to opera recordings given to him, Still developed his own curriculum for music where he taught himself to play several instruments, including the cello and various wind instruments. Eventually he would make his way to Ohio where he played in several bands, came into contact with important teachers such as W.C. Handy, and enrolled to study music at the Oberlin Conservatory in 1916. After several years in Ohio, Still moved to New York to continue his career as a professional musician. For the first few years, Still worked as a band arranger and musician for several black musicals, including one of the most important,

³² Smith, *William Grant Still*.

Shuffle Along.³³ In New York, Still would have a career breakthrough while working at the Black Swan Theater. The French avant-garde composer Edgard Varèse contacted the theater looking to work with promising young composers, resulting in Still working with him for the next two years. Not only did Varèse expand Still's compositional capabilities, he provided him with opportunities for his music to be heard in such prestigious venues as the Aeolian Hall. Additionally, he connected Still with important conductors of the day. During his time with Varèse, Still would develop his compositional language as exemplified in such pieces as *From the Land of Dreams*, *Levee Land*, and *Darker America*. However, it would not be until 1931 that his true recognition came via his *Afro-American Symphony*. After its success, Still would begin to focus on various so-called "serious" forms of music, specifically opera. His first opera was *Blue Steal*, but Still's most well-known opera is *Troubled Island*, which has a libretto by the famous black author Langston Hughes. Although *Troubled Island* is the highlight of Still's musical career, the only one of his operas to be recorded is the shorter opera *Highway 1, U.S.A.*

Highway 1, U.S.A. tells the story of Bob and his wife Mary who own a gas station. They work hard to maintain their business, and support Bob's lazy brother Nate. Bob's mother had made him promise to take care of his younger brother before she died, and he feels obligated to honor this promise. However, Nate becomes jealous of Bob and Mary's relationship and attempts to kill her, and allow Bob to be held responsible. Specific information for the opera is as follows:

³³ Ibid.

CAST

BOB, gas station owner/Baritone

MARY, Bob's wife, co-owner of the gas station/Soprano

NATE, Bob's brother/Tenor

AUNT LOU, Mary's Aunt/Mezzo-Soprano

CHORUS: Church Congregation Members, SHERIFF/Bass, Soprano Solo, Tenor Solo, Baritone Solo

ORCHESTRA INSTRUMENTATION:

4 First Violins, 4 Second Violins, 4 Violas, 4 Cellos, 2 Bass, 1 Flute, 1 Piccolo, 1 Oboe, 1 English Horn, 2 Bassoon, 2 Clarinets, 2 French Horns, 2 Trumpets, 2 Trombones, 1 Harp, 1 Percussion, 1 Timpani³⁴

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: Bob & Mary's kitchen of their cottage adjoined to the filling station

Mary is singing happily as she is helping Bob get ready to travel with members of the church to his brother Nate's college graduation. They've been helping to pay for his tuition with the money they earn from their business, and now Mary is looking forward to only taking care of themselves. When Bob explains that Nate will still need their help in order to get established, Mary becomes upset. As Bob is thanking her for being patient and staying with him even though things have been difficult, the members of the local church arrive. They are traveling with Bob to Nate's graduation, as Mary and her Aunt Lou stay behind to look after the filling station. After Bob and the members from the church have left, Aunt Lou expresses her love for Mary and assures her that things between her, Bob, and Nate will work out for the better.

³⁴ Soll, *Arias, Duets, and Scenes*.

ACT II: 1 year after Nate's graduation from college

Bob and Mary are having breakfast and discussing their concerns over Nate's abuse of their hospitality. Although Bob still feels obligated by his promise to his mother, he decides that it has been long enough and that Nate needs to take care of himself. Bob calls Nate to breakfast and heads off to start the day at the filling station. Nate comes to breakfast and lets Mary know that he overheard her and Bob speaking about him. As he explains his point of view Mary shows compassion, which Nate mistakes for attraction. As he begins to express his attraction to her, Mary emphatically rebuffs his advances. Mary's ridicule of Nate infuriates him, and he stabs her in a fit of jealous rage. Bob and Aunt Lou enter seeing Mary lying on the floor, and Aunt Lou runs to get help. When Aunt Lou leaves, Nate begins to plead with Bob to help him once again. When the Sheriff arrives, Bob, believing Mary is dead, says that he killed her in order to protect his brother. But when Mary regains consciousness and indicates that it was Nate who stabbed her, Nate is taken into custody. Bob, elated that Mary is still alive, sings of his new promise to make her his priority. The opera closes with Bob and Mary re-committing themselves to each other.

ARIA

A Dream Wasted

From: Act II

Setting: 1940's filling station in a small southern town

Character: Bob, the filling station owner

Range: D3 - F4

Tessitura: D3 - C4

Bob promised his mother before she died that he would take care of his younger brother Nate. But after continuing to support him a year after he's graduated from college, he sings to his wife, Mary, that he believes he has done enough. The aria is through-

composed. Still's score for this aria is very lush with sweeping, lyrical melodic lines, and use of very romantic tonalities.

Lyrics:

A dream wasted.
A sacrifice in vain!
Years lost to give the boy his chance!
Our hope shattered, our work all unrepaid!
Our days spent, and nothing gained;
Ingratitude has crowned our efforts!

The things lost now will never be regained in this world.
Believe me; it hurts when I see him sleeping all day.
Believe me; it angers me when my wife waits on him like a slave.
Believe me; he does not deserve such kindly treatment.

He treats our friends like worthless morons.
Our way of living never fails to make him scornful.
He forgets so much!
This modest life gave him ev'rything!
Ev'ry advantage.

Up in heaven my Mother must have seen
How sadly we've failed to carry out her will.
I hope she knows how steadily we've toiled.
I hope she knows how honestly we've tried.
I hope she knows how much I value her judgment!

But no, maybe, it's not too late.
Where she found good there must be good.
Since she loved him,
Since she believed in him,
Then I promise I'll try again.³⁵

³⁵ Soll, *Arias, Duets, and Scenes*.

6-Scott Joplin

Scott Joplin's exact date of birth is unknown, but through census records we know that he was born around the year 1868 in Texarkana, Texas. His father's name was Giles, who was a violinist and ex-slave, and his mother's name was Florence. She was a singer and banjo player, and was born free. Although the Joplin house was always full of music, it was young Scott Joplin's discovery of improvisation on the piano that prompted him to become dedicated to being a musician. Soon he would become known as a kind of *wunderkind* throughout the Texarkana black and white communities for his extraordinary gift of improvisation. This would eventually connect him with his first teacher, a German immigrant whose name is not known, who instructed Joplin in piano and harmony. He also gave Joplin a "glimpse of the world of education," which he would continue to pursue for the rest of his life.³⁶ Leaving home to follow the pattern of a typical traveling black musician, Joplin traveled through various towns until reaching St. Louis in 1885. He would remain there until 1893, when he would settle in Sedalia, Missouri. In Sedalia, Joplin began to do more composing and publishing, including *Maple Leaf Rag*. *Maple Leaf Rag* became so popular that earnings from its worldwide sales garnered Joplin the title of "King of Ragtime."³⁷ After moving back to St. Louis in 1900, Joplin focused on building his life with his new wife Belle Hayden, as well as teaching, composing, and continuing his own education. Although he composed

³⁶Joplin et al., *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha: Vocal Selections*, 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

over nineteen pieces for piano during his first years in St. Louis, Joplin was also very interested in composing larger works for the theater. His first attempt at it was *The Ragtime Dance*, an extended ragtime song that included dancers executing steps as “called” by a singer leading the song. This was followed by *A Guest of Honor*, which was a ragtime opera. No copy of the score exists, and it is believed to have been destroyed by Joplin himself. His last venture into producing a large work for the stage is *Treemonisha*. Joplin had difficulty finding a publisher to take on his stage works, which led him to publish *Treemonisha* on his own in 1911. During this time his health was failing, but he was determined to attract financial backing to produce his opera. A hearing of the score was an unfortunate disaster, which prevented the opera from being produced until after Joplin’s death in 1917. It would be over fifty years before the complete work was heard under the direction of Robert Shaw at the Morehouse College Music Department in January of 1972. It was well received, and reproduced in a similar fashion the summer of 1972 at the Filene Center/Wolftrap Farm Park. *Treemonisha* received even more acclaim when it was performed by the Houston Grand Opera in 1975, and since then has been considered an extraordinary work of art.

Treemonisha tells the story of a young, educated black woman who becomes the leader of her town. After being freed from slavery, Ned and Monisha were made managers of a plantation in Arkansas. Many in the community were of a superstitious nature, and in search of a leader. When the

violence in the community comes to a head, Treemonisha, Ned and Monisha's adopted daughter, is selected as the leader for whom they have been searching. She has received an education, and believes that doing so will help eradicate the violence and build a better society as they continue to thrive as free people of color. Specific information on the opera is as follows:

CAST:

TREEMONISHA, Ned and Monisha's adopted daughter/Soprano
CEPHUS, a conjurer/Tenor
LUCY, Treemonisha's friend/Mezzo-Soprano
LUDDUD, a conjurer/Baritone
MONISHA, Treemonisha's mother, Ned's wife/Contralto
NED, Treemonisha's father, Monisha's husband/Bass
PARSON ALLTALK, a preacher/Baritone
REMUS, Treemonisha's friend/Tenor
SIMON, a conjurer/Bass
ZODZETRICK, a conjurer/Baritone
DANCERS
CHORUS: Corn Huskers, Conjurers

RAGTIME ORCHESTRATION:

1 Piccolo, 1 Flute, 1 Clarinet, 2 Cornets, 1 Trombone, Drums, Piano, 2 Violins,
1 Viola, 1 Cello, 1 Bass³⁸

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: Ned and Monisha's Plantation

The opera begins in the year 1884 on a plantation managed by Ned and his wife Monisha. Zodzetrick, a conjurer, is attempting to convince Monisha to buy a bag of "goofer dust" to bring her good luck, and claims it will stop her

³⁸ Scherer, "*Treemonisha As It Was Intended*."

husband from drinking so much. Ned strongly objects her purchasing it because he believes that it will be very expensive and also fears that it may actually have some effect on him. When Treemonisha, who is now 18 and the only educated member of the community, begins to insult Zodzetrick and his conjuring ways, he threatens that he will use his “goofer dust” on her and swears he will never change his conjuring ways. After Zodzetrick leaves, the rest of the community comes together and begins to go about their duties. They ask Treemonisha why she favors one of the trees of the plantation. Monisha then decides to reveal to everyone, including Treemonisha, that she was found underneath that tree, and that she is adopted. All are shocked by the news, but are understanding. We then meet Parson Alltalk, who preaches to his parishioners a sermon full of “Good Advice”. As Alltalk is leaving, Monisha sees Lucy in the distance, running home bound and gagged. She tells them Treemonisha has been kidnapped by Zodzetrick and the other conjurers.

ACT II: In the woods with the Conjurers

As Simon is leading the conjurers through a song of their superstitious beliefs, Zodzetrick and Luddud enter, bringing Treemonisha. As they’re preparing to punish her for not believing in their superstitions, they see Remus in disguise and believe him to be the devil. While the conjurers are running away to save themselves, Remus frees Treemonisha and they return to the plantation.

ACT III: Ned and Monisha's cabin

As Ned is attempting to comfort Monisha, who is worried she'll never see Treemonisha again, Remus and Treemonisha return and are welcomed by all the members of the community. Following them are the Corn Husker boys, who have captured Zodzetrick and Luddud. Although the others want to punish them, Treemonisha encourages them to forgive the conjurers "for her sake."³⁹ Treemonisha then suggests that a leader of the community be selected. All insist that she take the position. Treemonisha agrees, though hesitantly, as the opera closes with her leading all members of the community, conjurers and corn huskers, through a slower "caller" song.

ARIA

When Villains Ramble Far and Near

From: Act III

Setting: 1884, Ned and Monisha's cabin on their plantation

Character: Ned, Treemonisha's father

Range: D2 - D4

Tessitura: D3 - A3

After Treemonisha is rescued, Zodzetrick and the other conjurers are captured by the Corn Huskers. Instead of retaliating, Treemonisha convinces Ned to lecture them on the consequences of living villainous lives. The aria is strophic with a form of ABA'B' and opens with an instrumental introduction. Similarity to Wagner can be heard in the tonality of the harmonic texture.

Lyrics:

When villains ramble far and near,
To break the people's laws,
Their punishment should be severe,
Within the devil's claws.
When villains ramble far and near,

³⁹ Joplin, *Treemonisha*, 195

With their hearts full of sin,
They do much wrong without a fear,
But some day right will win.

CHORUS

We stay close at home,
When villains rambling we can hear
We have no chance to roam,
When heartless villains are so near.
We dare not sleep at night,
When we have an awful fear,
We keep a brilliant light,
When villains ramble far and near.

When villains ramble far and near,
And cause great alarm,
We wish for them a short career,
Before they do great harm.
When villains ramble far and near,
To treat other people bad,
They should be despatched to the other sphere,
To make old Satan feel glad.

REPEAT CHORUS⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Joplin, *Treemonisha*, 196-199.

Conclusion

One genre of music that all these composers incorporate in their operatic compositions is jazz, whether directly observed, as in Ellington's *Queenie Pie*, or conceptually observed as in Davis' *X*. Another interesting relationship is that between the earliest and latest composers, Scott Joplin and Nkeiru Okoye. Joplin's composition seems to point forward musically, while Okoye's seems to point backward, resulting in a striking similarity in the setting of their works. Themes present in all these works are the social, educational, professional, and economic advancement of the African American community. Inter-community relations are also a very prominent theme, as seen in the Conjurers and Cornhuskers in *Treemonisha*, and the free and slave black people in *Harriet Tubman*. These are themes that are still relevant to the African American community and American society as well. With the controversy and debates regarding racial equality in America, and the continuing strides for unity in the African American community, works like these could prove invaluable. The complexity, beauty, and excellence of these compositions merit their inclusion into the standard operatic repertoire, as well as the standard repertoire for singers of African descent. Examination of these works also reveals the compositional evolution of the music by African American composers. The innovations by artists such as Ellington and Still made it possible for artists today such as Davis and Blanchard to continue to be innovative using African American musical idioms such as jazz. It is my hope that this document will serve as a resource for singers of African descent, and as an informational tool to provide a broader awareness not only of the operatic repertoire of African American composers, but also of African American composers in general.

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Appendix

I want a brown skinned gal
from ***Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom***
by Dr. Nkeiru Okoye

"Brown Skinned Gal"

from HARRIET TUBMAN: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom

Words and Music by
Nkeiru Okoye

Moderato (♩. = c. 65) *Secco*

Baritone

Some men, they like a yel- low gal — with

3 skin near white and hair so long. — Leave thoughts of A - fri - ca and slaves be -

5 hind. No gal as dark as me he says, — and — to his dar - ker sis - ters, he's — un -

© 2006

Andante (M.M. ♩ = c. 76)

8 kind. — But me I like a brown skinned — gal, — skin co - lor of mo - la - sses.

Andante (M.M. ♩ = c. 76)

11 Brown skinned — gal, — broad nose and long eye-la-shes. Your nap-py hair and dark brown

14 skin — have torn up — my heart.

Brown Skinned Gal

Performer may add lib comments such as, "Girl you know I love you", etc.

17 Mar-ry me, my Ba-by. Be my brown skinned brown skinned gal.

20

23

Brown Skinned Gal

26 I want a brown skinned ____ gal. ____ No o- ther one will do. Be my

29 brown skinned ____ gal, ____ cain't think of none but you.

31 Some folks like them ligh - ter, ____ thinks their fu - ture's brigh - ter, ____ but me I want a

34 brown skinned wo-man for my bride. Just the thought of her heats me up ____ in -

37 side. Girl, I love them roun-ded hips. Want to kiss them jui-cy lips. ____ So

40 I just want a brown skinned, round hipped, jui - cy lipped, broad nosed, ____

Brown Skinned Gal

43 nap - py hea - ded, brown skinned wo - man.

46

48

Brown Skinned Gal

Brown Skinned Gal

From *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line To Freedom*

arr. Robert McNichols, Jr.

Nkeiru Okoye

Andante $\text{♩} = 76$

Saxophone:

The musical score for the Saxophone part is written in 12/8 time and consists of eight staves. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The score begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The first staff contains measures 1 through 3. The second staff, starting at measure 4, contains measures 4 through 7. The third staff, starting at measure 8, contains measures 8 through 11. The fourth staff, starting at measure 12, contains measures 12 through 14. The fifth staff, starting at measure 15, contains measures 15 through 18. The sixth staff, starting at measure 19, contains measures 19 through 22. The seventh staff, starting at measure 23, contains measures 23 through 25. The eighth staff, starting at measure 26, contains measures 26 through 30. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and rests, with some measures containing triplets or other complex rhythms.

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Brown Skinned Gal

2



What makes a man a man
from ***Champion***
by Terence Blanchard

PIANO/VOCAL

CHAMPION

ACT I - 21.

WHAT MAKES A MAN A MAN

Terence Blanchard

Young Emile

$\text{♩} = 65$ *p*

What makes a man a man? _____ What makes a man the man he is?

1 2 3 4 5

Young Emile

ritard *A Tempo*

Is it the flesh and bone? _____ in - side? out - side? Is it the skin he wears? _____

6 7 8 9

Young Emile

The co - lor of his voice? _____ The walk he walks? _____ The talk he talks? _____

10 11 12 13

mp

ritard ⁻²⁻
A Tempo

Young Emile

In - side? out - side? What makes this man a man?

14 15 16

Is it the life he's lived? The yes - ter - days? Or what he

17 18 19

ritard **A Tempo**

dreams for the to - mor - row days? In - side? Out - side? There is a

20 21 22 23 24

heart I know some - where in side. You hear it beat, you hear it

25 26 27

HD 2/20/13

Young Emile

sing It cries and talks to you—and tells you what you feel, is what you feel in—

28 29 30 31

mf

Young Emile

side It makes you strong? Or does it make you weak out - side? There

32 33 34

sub p

Young Emile

is a soul, I know some-where in - side— You feel it pull You feel it lift It

35 36 37 38 39

mf f mp mf

Young Emile

ca - ries you and takes you where you know you have to go and love and

40 41 42 43

f mf

HD 2/20/13

Young Emile

love _____ and love is in this heart and in this soul. It makes you

44 45 46

ritard

Young Emile

strong in - side? Or does it make you weak? In - side. Out - side. And

47 48

A Tempo

Young Emile

some - where there, where love is liv - ing, there is a man who is the

mp

49 50 51

Young Emile

man I am In - side the man I am and out - side?

52 53 54 55

HD 2/20/13

Young Emile

Out - side? This man that all this world can see Who is this

mp *mf*

56 57 58

Young Emile

man? Who is this man who calls him - self me?

f *mf*

59 60 61 62

Young Emile

There was no sound There were no peo - ple I could see In my head,

chorus sustains and staggers "maricon" slowly and randomly in written pitches until bar 70

Choir

mp *p*

63 64 65 66

Young Emile

the place was emp - ty There was no one there but me Ma - ri - con

Choir

Ma - ri - con

67 68 69 70 71

♩ = 110

Transition - piano solo sounds of an arena boxing environment

mf

72 73 74

75 76 77

C^{7sus}

fills, ad lib.

78 79 80

C^{7sus}

fills, ad lib.

81 82 83

I wouldn't tell you what I know
from ***X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X***
by Terence Blanchard

A382 *(Clar. Solo)*
Improvise - indefinite duration

A387

A390

A393

A396

A399

A402

NO. 0920 - 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1955 8 WAY, N. Y.

M. 

A405 

M. 

A408 

M. 

A411 

M. 

A414 

M. *a ve-ry long time* *Long-er than I can*

A417

M. *say.* *As long as I've been liv-ing, —*

A420

M. *you've had your foot on me, —* *al-ways press-ing. —*

A423

M. *My truth is White men —*

A426

Bva - - -

NO. D520 • 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1935 6 WAY, N. Y.

M. *hilled my old man, drows my moth-er mad.*

A429

M. *My truth is rough, my truth could kill, my*

A432

M. *truth is fu-ry.*

A435

M. *They*

A438

NO. D820 - 20 STAVE

KING BRAND
1593 B'WAY, N. Y.

M. *al - ways told me,*

A441

M. *you don't have a chance* *you're a nig-ger*

A444

M. *af - ter all.* *You can jit - ter - bug and prance* *but you'll ne - ver*

A447

M. *run the ball.*

A450

NO. 0520 - 20 STAVE

KING BRAND
1535 B'WAY, N. Y.

M. *M.*

A453

M. *M.*

My truth told me, quit be - fore you

A456

M. *M.*

start. My truth told me stay-ing a - live is

A459

M. *M.*

all you got.

A462

NO. D820 - 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1935 B'WAY, N. Y.

M. *I've shined your shoes, _____ I've sold your*

A465

M. *dope, _____ hauled your boot-lag, _____*

A468

M. *played with hustlar's hope,*

A471

M. *but the crime is mine. _____ I will*

A474

NO. DS 20 - 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1595 B'WAY, N. Y.

M. *do your time _____ so you can sleep.*

A477

M. *I won't be out to get you on the street at night,*

A480

M. *but I won't for- get _____ an- y e- vil that's white.*

A483

M.

A486

NO. 0820 - 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1535 B'WAY, N. Y.

M. *My truth is a ham-mer com-ing from the back.*

A489

M. *It will beat you — down when you least ex - pect*

A492

M. *I would-n't tell you — what I know, — you want the truth, —*

A495

M. *you want the truth. — You want the truth but you don't want to know.*

A498

NO. 0520 - 20 STAVE

X

KING BRAND
1595 B'WAY, N. Y.

Handwritten musical score for 'M.' and 'A501'. The score is written on a system of five staves. The first staff is for 'M.' and the second for 'A501'. The music is in 3/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes a 'ritard.' marking and a 'ped.' marking. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Woman

from ***Queenie Pie***

by Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington

Piano/Vocal Score Pending

Woman

arr. Robert McNichols, Jr.

From *Queenie Pie*

Edward Kennedy Ellington

Saxophone:

The musical score for the saxophone part of 'Woman' is written in B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by an eighth-note triplet (F4, G4, A4), then a half note (B4), a quarter note (A4), and a half note (G4). The second staff continues with a quarter note (F4), an eighth-note triplet (E4, D4, C4), a half note (B4), and a quarter note (A4). The third staff features a half note (G4), a quarter note (F4), a half note (E4), and a quarter note (D4). The fourth staff has a half note (C4), a quarter note (B3), a half note (A3), and a quarter note (G3). The fifth staff begins with a half note (F3), a quarter note (E3), a half note (D3), and a quarter note (C3). The sixth staff has a half note (B2), a quarter note (A2), a half note (G2), and a quarter note (F2). The seventh staff features a half note (E2), a quarter note (D2), a half note (C2), and a quarter note (B1). The eighth staff concludes with a half note (A1) and a quarter note (G1). The score includes various musical notations such as rests, eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and triplets, as well as dynamic markings like 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano).

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A Dream Wasted
from ***Highway 1, USA***
by William Grant Still

Piano/Vocal Score Pending

When Villains Ramble Far and Near
from ***Treemonisha***
by Scott Joplin

Musical score for the 'D' and 'Ddim' sections. The score is written for piano (mp) and features a treble and bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. The 'D' section consists of a series of chords in the treble and a single note in the bass. The 'Ddim' section features a more complex melodic line in the treble and a moving bass line.

1. When vil - lains ram - ble far _____ and near, _____ To
 2. When vil - lains ram - ble far _____ and near, _____ And

break the peo - ple's laws,
cause _____ great a - larm, _____

Em Gm6 A7 D Adim

in fore the they dev do il's great claws. harm. claws. harm.

mp

When vil - lains ram - ble far and near,
 When vil - lains ram - ble far and near, To

With their hearts full of sin,
treat oth-er peo-ple bad.

D Ddim D
 They do much wrong with - out a fear, But
 They should be des - patched to the oth - er sphere, To

F#m A7 Adim A7 Gm6 A7 Refrain
 some day right will win. We
 make old Sa - tan feel glad.

D Ddim D Dm
 stay close at home, When

F/C C7 Em C/Bb A7
 vil - lains ram - bling we can hear, We

mp *f* *rit.* *mf*

D Ddim Adim

have _____ no chance to roam, _____ When

A7 Adim A7 D

heart - less vil - lains are so near. _____ We

F#7 Bm

dare _____ not sleep at night, _____ When we

E7 A A#dim

have _____ an aw - ful fear, _____ We

keep a bril - liant light, When vil - lains ram - ble far and

ff *mp rit.*

D Ddim

near.

a tempo

Gm6 A7 Adim A7 (+5)

mp

2. D A7 D Gm D

vil - lains ram - ble far and near.

rit. p subito

The musical score is written for a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into four systems. The first system contains the first line of the vocal melody with lyrics 'keep a bril - liant light, When vil - lains ram - ble far and'. The piano accompaniment features a strong *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line with 'near.' and includes a *mp rit.* (mezzo-piano, ritardando) marking. The piano part has a *a tempo* marking. The third system shows a change in piano texture with a *mp* (mezzo-piano) dynamic and various chords (Gm6, A7, Adim, A7, +5). The fourth system begins with a second ending marked '2.' and includes lyrics 'vil - lains ram - ble far and near.' with a *rit.* (ritardando) and *p subito* (piano subito) marking.